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ADDRESS

OF THE

COMMITTEE

TO

THE PEOPLE OF ENGLAND.

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* * * "The Devising Heads and Executive Hands of the English Government, as described by Privy-Councillors and Civil Servants themselves," being Official Paper, No. 2, is printed in the same size and type with the present publication, for the convenience of those who desire to bind up the publications of the Association. They may be had by Members of the Association on application at the Offices, 86, King William Street, City; and will be forwarded by post to Members resident in the country, the new law enabling them to be sent for a single stamp.

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ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM.

ADDRESS.

FELLOW-COUNTRYMEN,

The ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM ASSOCIATION has been brought into existence by the exigency of the time. Its Members have no interest in agitation; no personal ambition to serve; no individual advantages to gain; they intend no personal attack; they can only enter upon the movement, which involves a long and arduous struggle, at a large sacrifice of time and means. They have long seen the absolute need of such a movement, but have delayed to undertake it, in the hope that it would have been set on foot by others; the work has, however, been placed in their hands, and they are determined to spare no effort for its accomplishment. There never was a period when, under similar emergency, the people so long remained silent; there has been a positive sense of danger in the quiet. It has been matter of wonder, that, with daily accumulated evidence of mismanagement, the most general and of the grossest kind, there have been so few public meetings; that, with proof that millions of pounds have been actually thrown away, an increase of taxation amounting to more than thirty millions has been submitted to without a murmur; that, though every post has brought letters to thousands of the poorest in the land, detailing the horrors of the winter before Sebastopol,—there has been no organized movement. The want of forethought, the incapacity, the mismanagement, the complication of duties, the adherence to routine at the cost of human life, the thousands of brave men wasted by overwork, by exposure, by insufficiency of clothes and shelter, by unwholesome food, by hunger, by lack of medicine and medical attendance, by neglected wounds, by starvation in the very hospitals,—have called forth no popular outburst. There has been no protest against those in command, against the

Ministry, against the Parliament. We believe that this silence is not safe; that if some organization were not set on foot to give utterance to the pent-up indignation of the people, and to give hope of a better future, some movement would speedily show itself, of which it would be impossible to foretell the results. "*Where there is abuse (says Burke) there ought to be clamour, because it is better that our slumbers should be broken by the fire-bell than that we should perish in the flames.*"

Fellow-Countrymen, the war is the first thought with all; it is impossible to divert attention from the appalling facts, that actual battle has swept down 5,000 men, mismanagement 15,000; that of £6,000,000 spent upon transport ships, full £2,000,000 were as utterly wasted as if the money had been thrown into the Black Sea; that ships filled with essential stores, provisions, and clothing were exposed to the fury of a foreseen storm, and wrecked and sunken from sheer obstinacy. The recent addition to the income tax, the increased duties upon tea, sugar, and coffee, have been rendered necessary by the grossest blundering and mismanagement. It is difficult to dispel the doubt that we have not yet before us the entire account of the year, and are still in ignorance of the total cost of the war.

We wish it, however, to be distinctly understood, that the Administrative Reform Association is no mere war organization—for whether there be war or peace its work will be continued. Mismanagement in several important departments of State has been disclosed, rather than produced, by the war, and is by no means confined to those departments. The whole system of Government Offices is such as in any private business would lead to inevitable ruin. The non-ministerial heads hold office for life, and are virtually irresponsible for the efficiency of their departments. It is not in their power to dismiss for incompetency, or promote for merit. Many departments are not called upon to make systematic reports of the condition of their offices, or of the work done either in the whole or parts of offices. It is not the duty of any one to be acquainted with the actual state of all the Government Offices. They are never treated as a whole. There is no one to note the ablest men, the real workers, in each department—no one to point out where men are egregiously misplaced. There are scattered through the Government offices men of very great

ability;—Some are admirable accountants — some well acquainted with European and Oriental languages—some have an aptitude for organization and supervision—some are practical business men, who, in the right places, would save whole departments from endless blundering. Such men are continually needed, but there is no one to be found with any official knowledge of the existence of such special ability, and the most incompetent persons are appointed to posts that these men would have filled with infinite credit to themselves and advantage to the State. It is clear, then, that, if for no other reason, to discover what available talent for particular departments is to be found in them, there should at once be made a thorough inquiry into the qualifications of the entire staff of every Government Office.

But this is not all: there are very few people who really know what Government Offices there are, or even where they are; and there is no one at all who knows, as a whole, their responsibilities, duties, and mode of conducting business. In many instances it is either altogether impossible, or attended with endless trouble and delays, to discover to what department, or officer of a department, any duty (it may be requiring the most urgent dispatch) really belongs. It is admitted, that the consequent delays double the expense of the transaction of the public business; and that there are twice as many persons employed as would be required under a proper system of original appointment, arrangement of business, and fairly-earned promotion. Nor is the evil confined to the conduct of business in the offices themselves; we have it on the authority of Lord John Russell, that, under existing arrangements, “the time of Ministers is so very much absorbed with the duties of their offices, that there are very few of them who can give their attention to a great subject, and look at the consequences to the country of the measures which are adopted.” *It is clear, therefore, that, almost as a first step to Administrative Reform, there is needed, for the information of the public and their representatives in Parliament, a succinct account of the Government Offices as they are, with as accurate a Digest as is obtainable, of their several duties, their manner of conducting business, the expenses of conducting it, and the time it takes.*

In addition to this it will be essential to obtain information as to the duties, privileges, and official patronage of the Ministers

of the Crown. The public information upon the subject amounts practically to nothing.

On the 29th of May last, Mr. Gladstone, in reply to Sir H. Willoughby, stated, that "he spoke within the mark, that it would require at least two hours for him to make an explanation that would be intelligible of the complicated system of powers lodged in the hands of the Chancellor of the Exchequer by the existing law. In his opinion those powers well deserved, and, indeed, he should say required, the deliberate consideration of the House. . . . The Finance Minister of this country had, in many respects, too little power in his hands for the good of the public; whereas, in other respects, he had a great deal too much power, and exercised powers that ought to be greatly restricted."—There has been no such explanation; there is no reliable source of information from which it can be learned how far the Chancellor of the Exchequer holds his powers under Act of Parliament—how far under notions of Royal Prerogative—how far under mere prescriptive abuse of power and traditions of office. In what precise relation the Secretary to the Treasury stands to the Chancellor of the Exchequer—whether he can act only under direction of the Chancellor, or can act of himself; whether he or his chief really supervise the national balance sheet, or whether both, or either, take it for granted as it comes to them, are matters alike unknown. These may, for all the public can discover, be mere questions of official opinion. Yet, this is the kind of information of which Parliament and the people stand most in need. There is clearly but little use in the controlling power of Parliament upon taxation, if the Chancellor of the Exchequer can, of his own will, create permanent debt, or pledge the credit of the nation, or deal, without sanction of Parliament, with the millions of hard earnings deposited in the Savings Banks.

The Foreign Office is another region of unknown powers, and undefined, if any, responsibility.—What amount of Government is carried on there—what amount of dictatorship exercised, is utterly unknown. There is nowhere to be found any complete definition of the powers, privileges, patronage, and expenditure of the Foreign department; it is carried on under the screen of an imaginary necessity of official secrecy. The character of the nation abroad is thus left to the one man who may happen to be Secretary of State

for Foreign Affairs, and to those who may have him for the time in their power.

The public found, to its amazement, when we first entered upon the war, that its conduct belonged to the Colonial Office ; and, probably, there are but few who know that that office has still charge of the Order of the Bath, established for the promotion of civil and military merit. The Colonial Office is in itself a Government,—it controls the material prosperity, the resources and energies, and lays the foundation of the national character, for good or evil, of millions of people. It is scarcely too much to say, that it is determined, almost every hour, at the Colonial Office, whether colonists shall, in their new homes, continue to be our fellow-subjects, and retain their native enterprise, industry, and vigour of purpose ; or shall, under the vexatious and thwarting policy of Downing Street, become dwarfed and dwindled from the due proportions of the national character. Yet there is no account accessible to the public of how the business of the Colonial Office is carried on.

The Home Secretary's powers are alike undefined. Probably no one who has ever held the office would venture an account of the heterogeneous mass of duties imposed upon the Minister by statute, custom, prescription, and common law.

To get at all this information, wherever it exists, and to place it before the public in the plainest words is, with the help of the country, one of the first things the Association are determined to have done, cost what it may. *There must be an end put to every mystery of office—how the Administration of the country is carried on must be made plain to the most ordinary capacity. To this end Acts of Parliament must be searched—and returns obtained. The Association are resolved to have a complete Analysis of our Official System, a thorough clearing up of the question of personal responsibility. This will, of necessity, be a work of time and expense ; the Committee, however, are perfectly satisfied that the required means will be forthcoming, that subscriptions to the object will be general throughout the country, that a failing purse will never compel them to hold their hand.* They have already entered upon this portion of their labour, with the most experienced and energetic help, and will shortly be able to place some valuable information, in a convenient form, in the hands of the Members

of the Association. A knowledge of the actual state of the official system once attained, the next step will be to bring every department into a thoroughly business condition. The nation can afford to pension, even upon full pay, any amount of incapacity, but it cannot afford to retain incapacity.

But, beyond all this, there is much to be accomplished by the Constituencies themselves. The individuals of the several parties invariably sent for on any change of Ministry to form a Government are apparently limited in the choice of colleagues to a very narrow circle. The distribution of offices may be altered, but—with now and then an exception, and often a very ill-chosen and ill-placed exception—the same set of men, or at all events the same names and connexions, be they Liberals or Conservatives, hold, parliament after parliament, the entire governing power. The idea prevails that there are no men in the kingdom to take their places; that they, and they only, can command sufficient influence to give Government a majority in the Lords and Commons whilst Parliament sits, and a majority in the country at a general election. The candidates sent down from the Clubs are chosen with the constant object of upholding, whether in or out of office, the fixed Ministerial cliques. Upon Members so selected, the party circle has a continual hold; it is thus of the utmost importance, that the Electors in every borough and county should put an end to the system under which, not the constituencies, but the Clubs, choose who shall be members, and what places they shall represent. The Association would, therefore, urge the Electors, in all earnestness, to select their own candidates. It is an essential step in Administrative Reform, that the Constituencies shall shake off the Clubs and their Agents. There is nothing in an election to require the assistance of a Parliamentary trafficker in seats.

Electors, if you would have an honest Government, you must choose your members honestly, and must set your faces determinedly against that disgraceful system which spends fortunes upon elections; you must resolve also, in earnest, to put an end to election corruption. *It is this that keeps aloof from Parliament your ablest men; they do not choose to be defeated,—they will not condescend to the conditions of success.* Means must be found to correct this grievous evil—the nation cannot afford to have its representation jobbed, and its best men deterred from Parliament.

With these objects before them, the Association invite every Constituency in the kingdom to make themselves acquainted with the opinions of their Representatives upon Administrative Reform; to call upon them to support in Parliament every question bearing upon the subject; to hold meetings; to organise local committees; to enrol members; to collect funds; to put themselves in immediate communication with the Committee in London; to be ready for an election—ready with worthy candidates, an honest Committee, and a thorough determination to have done with the abuses of elections.

Fellow-Countrymen, we have reached a turning point in our national history; we know now that we can go on no longer as we have done—that, following the beaten track, we are no longer sure of our position. We must either work out a thorough change, or take a lower grade in the world. But there is no ground for despondency: the nation is not worn out—the people were never more strong of purpose, more sound at heart, more united in opinion: it is the rulers and the system, “*the torpid hands of Government,*” that have failed us, not the people. Let the nation, therefore, “bend its whole force to the reduction of that corrupt influence which is itself the perennial spring of all prodigality and of all disorder, which loads us with debt, which takes away vigour from our arms, wisdom from our councils, and every shadow of authority and credit from the most venerable parts of our constitution.” Let the nation resolve that there shall be a searching and complete Administrative Reform, “that the right men shall be in the right places,” and there is nothing to apprehend for the position of England.

(Signed by order of the Committee)

SAMUEL MORLEY, *Chairman.*

WILLIAM TITE, *Deputy Chairman.*

J. I. TRAVERS, *Treasurer.*

OFFICES OF THE ASSOCIATION:

86, KING WILLIAM STREET, CITY.

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